

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A method of providing a value stamp over a communication network, comprising:
 - receiving from a user via the communication network an identifier code of a medium to be used to purchase a value stamp, the medium being suitable for printing a value indicium thereon, the identifier code identifying the medium;
 - accessing a database using the identifier code received from the user, the database including first and second identifier codes that are associated with first and second customer-relation-management (CRM) information, respectively;
 - performing a specific action according to a result of the accessing step, wherein a first action associated with the first CRM information is performed if the identifier code received from the user corresponds to the first identifier code stored in the database and a second action associated with the second CRM information is performed if the identifier code received from the user corresponds to the second identifier code stored in the database, and
 - determining whether or not the user has already used a maximum allotted free medium if the first CRM information indicates that the medium has been distributed as a free sample,
 - causing the value indicium to be printed on the medium to generate a value stamp if the medium has been previously purchased or if the user has not yet used the maximum allotted free medium.
2. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the first CRM information indicates that the medium is a medium that has not been purchased by the user, the first action involving charging the cost of the medium to the user prompting the user to decide whether the user wishes to purchase the medium for some amount.

3. (Previously presented) The method of claim 2, wherein the medium is a postage label sheet having a plurality of labels.

4. (Original) The method of claim 3, wherein a plurality of value indicia are printed on the plurality of labels to generate a plurality of value stamps.

5. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the first action involves determining whether an affiliate of a service provider requires an additional supply of the medium by examining the identifier code received from the user, wherein the affiliate is the user or a provider of the medium to the user, and wherein the service provider is an agent authorized to provide the value stamp to the user.

6. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, the method further comprising:

generating new customer-relation-management (CRM) information at least for the identifier code of the medium;

storing the generated CRM information in the database, wherein the database includes CRM information corresponding to a plurality of media; and

retrieving the CRM information corresponding to the identifier code received from the user, wherein the retrieved CRM information is used to determine whether the affiliate requires the additional supply of the medium.

7. (Original) The method of claim 5, wherein the value indicium is a postage indicium.

8. (Original) The method of claim 5, wherein the identifier code is a label serial number or a sheet serial number and is used to authenticate the medium.

9. (Original) The method of claim 5, wherein the identifier code enables one group of media to be differentiated from another group.

10. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the first CRM information indicates that the medium is a medium that has been distributed as a free sample, the first action involving displaying a message asking the user if he or she wishes to obtain an additional medium.

11. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the first action involves determining whether or not restocking of medium is needed by the user.

12. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the first action involves determining whether or not to allow the user to use the medium to purchase a value stamp over the network, the method further comprising:

determining whether or not the medium has been previously purchased; and
if not purchased previously, requiring the user to purchase the medium or commit to purchasing a medium before allowing the user to use the medium to purchase the value stamp over the network.

13. (Currently amended) A method of providing a value stamp over a communication network, comprising:

generating customer-relation-management (CRM) information corresponding to an identifier code of a medium to be distributed to a user, the medium being suitable for printing a value indicium thereon to produce a value stamp, the identifier code being suitable for distinguishing the medium from at least one other medium;

storing the generated CRM information in a database system, wherein the database system includes CRM information corresponding to a plurality of media;

providing the medium to a user having access to a data processing system;

receiving from the user over the network the identifier code of the medium to be used to purchase a value stamp;

retrieving the CRM information corresponding to the identifier code;

~~and performing a task associated with the CRM information.~~

determining whether or not the user has already used a maximum allotted free medium if the CRM information indicates that the medium has been distributed as a free sample, causing the value indicium to be printed on the medium to generate a value stamp if the medium has been previously purchased or if the user has not yet used the maximum allotted free medium.

14. (Original) The method of claim 13, further comprising:
determining whether an affiliate of a service provider requires an additional supply of the medium upon examining the identifier code, wherein the affiliate is the user or a provider of the medium to the user, and wherein the service provider is an agent authorized to provide the value stamp to the user.

15. (Original) The method of claim 13, further comprising:
determining whether or not the medium has been previously purchased; and
if not purchased previously, requiring the user to purchase the medium before allowing the user to use the medium to purchase the value stamp over the network.

16. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein the identifier code is additionally used as a security feature of the medium to authenticate the medium.

17. (Currently amended) A method of providing a postage medium to a user for use in purchasing a value stamp over a communication network, the method comprising:
generating customer-relation-management (CRM) information corresponding to a serial number of a medium to be distributed to a user, the medium being suitable for printing a value indicium thereon, the serial number uniquely identifying the medium;
storing the generated CRM information in a database system, wherein the database system includes CRM information corresponding to a plurality of media;
providing the medium to a user having access to a data processing system;
receiving from the user over the network the serial number of the medium to be used to purchase a postage stamp;

retrieving the CRM information corresponding to the serial number; and
determining whether an affiliate of a postage service provider requires an additional supply of the medium upon examining the serial number, wherein the affiliate is the user or a provider of postage medium to the user, and wherein the service provider is an agent authorized to provide the postage stamp to the user,

determining whether or not the user has already used a maximum allotted free medium if the first CRM information indicates that the medium has been distributed as a free sample,

causing the value indicium to be printed on the medium to generate a value stamp if the medium has been previously purchased or if the user has not yet used the maximum allotted free medium.

18. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of determining whether or not the user has already used the maximum allotted free medium, further comprising: assigning a counter to each user; and incrementing it by one each time the user uses a free label sheet to purchase stamps.